

Whitehorse Food Access Mapping Project: Phase 2 Report



**WHITEHORSE
CITY COUNCIL**



healthAbility

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge that this work was undertaken on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We recognise that they, and their Ancestors, have cared for and stewarded these lands and cultures sustainably for tens of thousands of years. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

‘Creating Change in the City of Whitehorse’ is a collaborative project between healthAbility and Whitehorse City Council. It aims to improve understanding of how people access food in Whitehorse and to support efforts to strengthen the local food system and improve how they people who work, live and play in Whitehorse can access food. The first phase of the project built on local government food environment maps developed by Sustain: The Australian Food Network and the North Eastern Public Health Unit (NEPHU),(1) with a focus on the location of food outlets across the City of Whitehorse (referred to as Whitehorse in this report

This report describes the findings of the second phase of the project which builds on phase one. Phase one found that food access across Whitehorse is uneven, with grocery stores (such as supermarkets, butchers) and ready-to-eat food outlets (such as drive through chains) concentrated in activity centres across Whitehorse, whilst some suburbs had limited local stores. Phase 2 maps options available beyond 'traditional' stores (such as grocery stores and ready-to-eat food outlets mapped in phrase one), including food relief services, such as food parcels, and community food access initiatives, such as community gardens. It also maps public transport routes to explore how residents across the municipality can travel to access food [outside of access to a private vehicle Several recommendations are proposed based on observations made through the mapping process.

Mapping the Local Food System – Phase 2

This report is designed to be used alongside an [interactive map](#) that shows the location of food relief services, community food access initiatives, and public transport across the City of Whitehorse. The map includes layers that users can switch on and off to explore different data sets and better understand the local food environment.

Access the interactive map [here](#).

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), specifically the Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD), were overlaid by suburb to show differences in socio-economic levels across the LGA.(2) These differences can influence how individuals access food, including the types of food outlets available and their financial capacity to purchase food.(3) Note that IRSD is classified using a quintile scale from 1 (most disadvantaged) to 5 (least disadvantaged). Quintiles are shown using varying shades of grey, with lighter shades representing higher levels of disadvantage.

Food relief services and community food access initiatives were mapped across Whitehorse to identify ways additional ways residents can access food beyond traditional retail outlets.

Food Relief Services

Food relief services provide short-term support to people experiencing food insecurity through the provision of low- or no-cost food. Services vary in the level of choice and preparation offered, and include food parcels, pantries, and prepared meals. A total of 16 food relief services were identified (see Table 1). Of these, 11 are faith-based organisations. Three services operate 24/7 (always open), with one offering delivery, highlighting the limited accessibility of services that operate of standard business hours.

Community Food Access Initiatives

Community food access initiatives focus on engagement and longer-term food system sustainability supporting people to buy, grow, or share food outside the retail system. They include community gardens, farmers' markets, and food swap programs. Six initiatives were identified (see Table 2), with three food swap programs the most common, followed by two community gardens and one farmers' market.

Table 1: Classification, quantity and map labels of food relief services in Whitehorse 2026

<u>Food Relief Services</u>				
Category	Description	Examples	Quantity	Map label
Pantries	Choose-your-own groceries	Crossway LifeCare Community, Stairway Church	5	
24/7 Pantries	Choose-your-own groceries anytime	Food for Thought Nunawading, Burwood Neighbourhood House, NewHope Community Care	3	
Food parcels	Pre-packaged groceries boxes	One Church Blackburn, Whitehorse, St Vincent de Paul	7	
Meals	Pre-prepared meals	St Mark's Anglican Church, Sikh Gurdwara	2	
<u>Community Food Access Initiatives</u>				
Category	Description	Examples	Quantity	Map label
Community Garden	Shared space to grow food	Burwood Community Garden, Crossway LifeCare	2	
Farmers Market	Market for fresh local produce	Whitehorse Farmers Market	1	
Food Swap	Exchange of surplus or homegrown food items	Urban Harvest, NewHope Baptist Church	3	

Public Transport

Train, tram, and bus routes across Melbourne's public transport network were mapped to understand how residents travel within Whitehorse, including to access food outlets. One train line (blue), three tram routes (green), and 27 bus routes (orange) were identified in Whitehorse (see Figure 1).

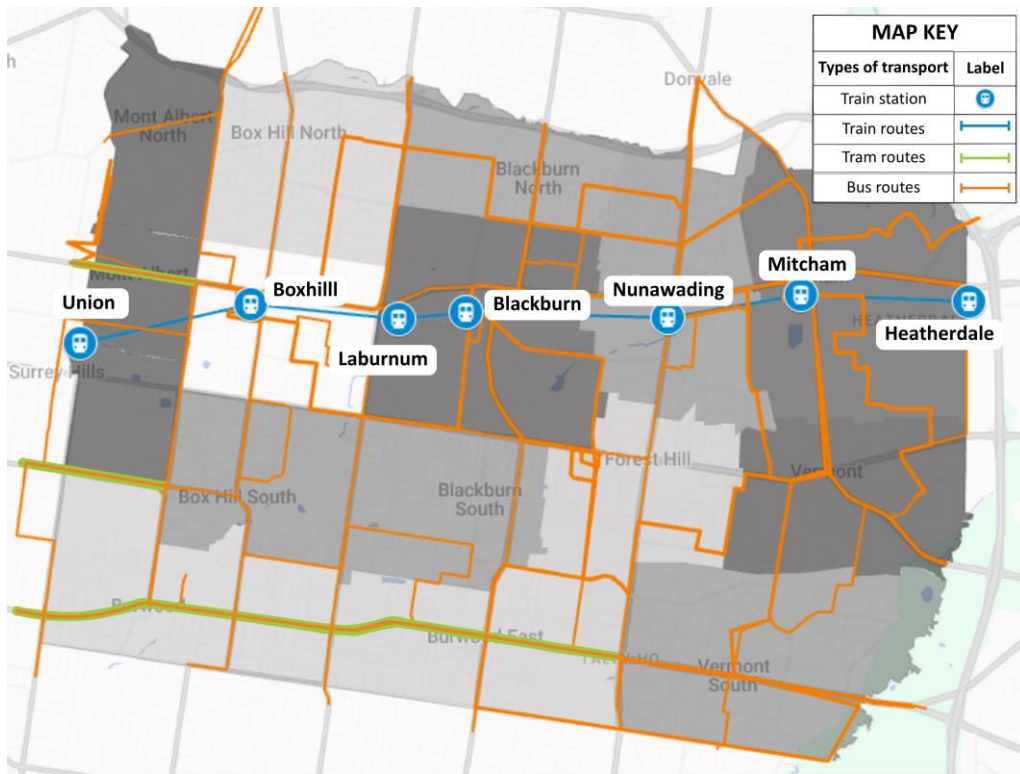


Figure 1: Public Transport Network in the City of Whitehorse

The distribution of food relief services, community food access initiatives, and public transport infrastructure is shown in Figure 2.

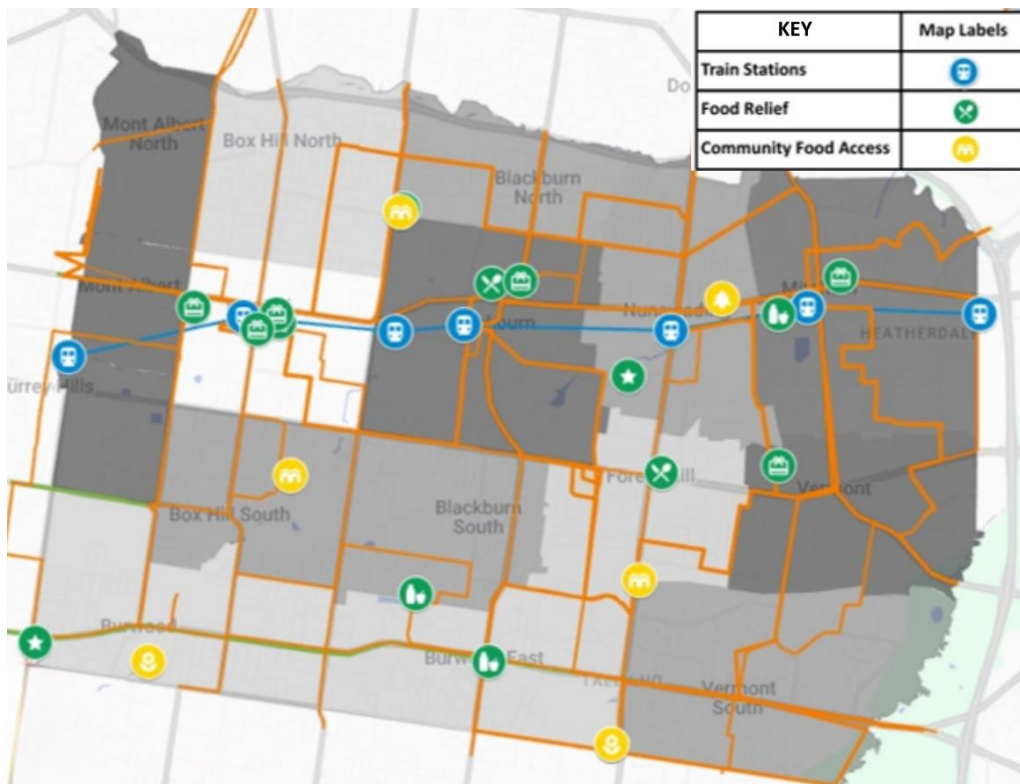


Figure 2: Food Relief Services and Community Food Access Initiatives with Public Transport Network in Whitehorse

Combined Phase 1 and Phase 2 Findings

Figure 3 adds to this by also including food outlets mapped in phase one of this project. Together, these maps show the distribution of food access locations and transport across the municipality.

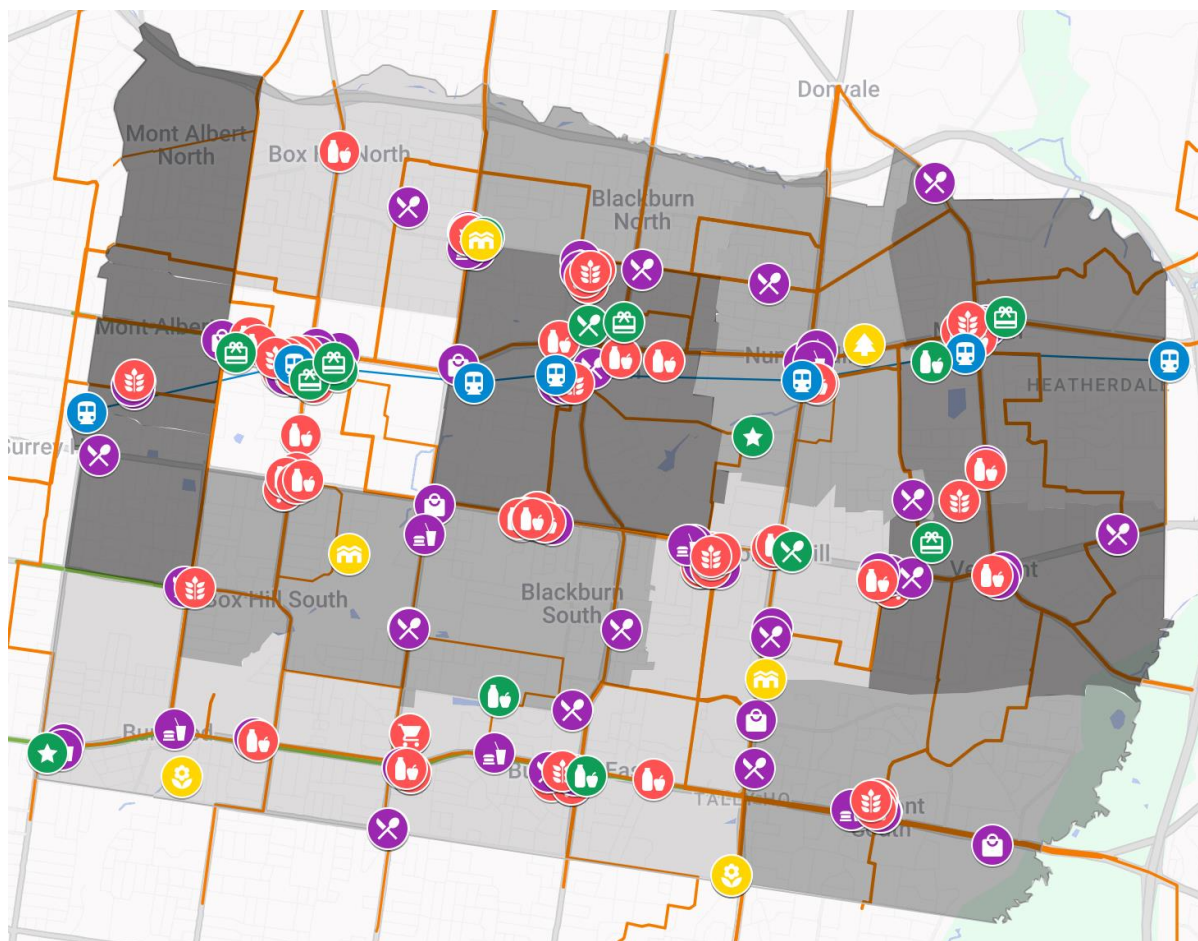


Figure 3: Distribution of grocery stores, ready-to-eat food outlets, food relief services and community food access initiatives and public transport routes in Whitehorse

Figures 1-3 show the Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD), shown through the grey shading of suburbs, across Whitehorse, which is a measure of Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). The IRSD summarises area-level disadvantage based on factors such as income, education, employment, and housing.

Figures 1-3 presents IRSD by suburb, while Figure 4 shows IRSD at the Statistical Area Level 1 (SA1). SA1s are small geographic areas used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to provide more detailed data. Overlaying SEIFA data with local food and transport data helps identify patterns between socio-economic position, food access, and transport availability.

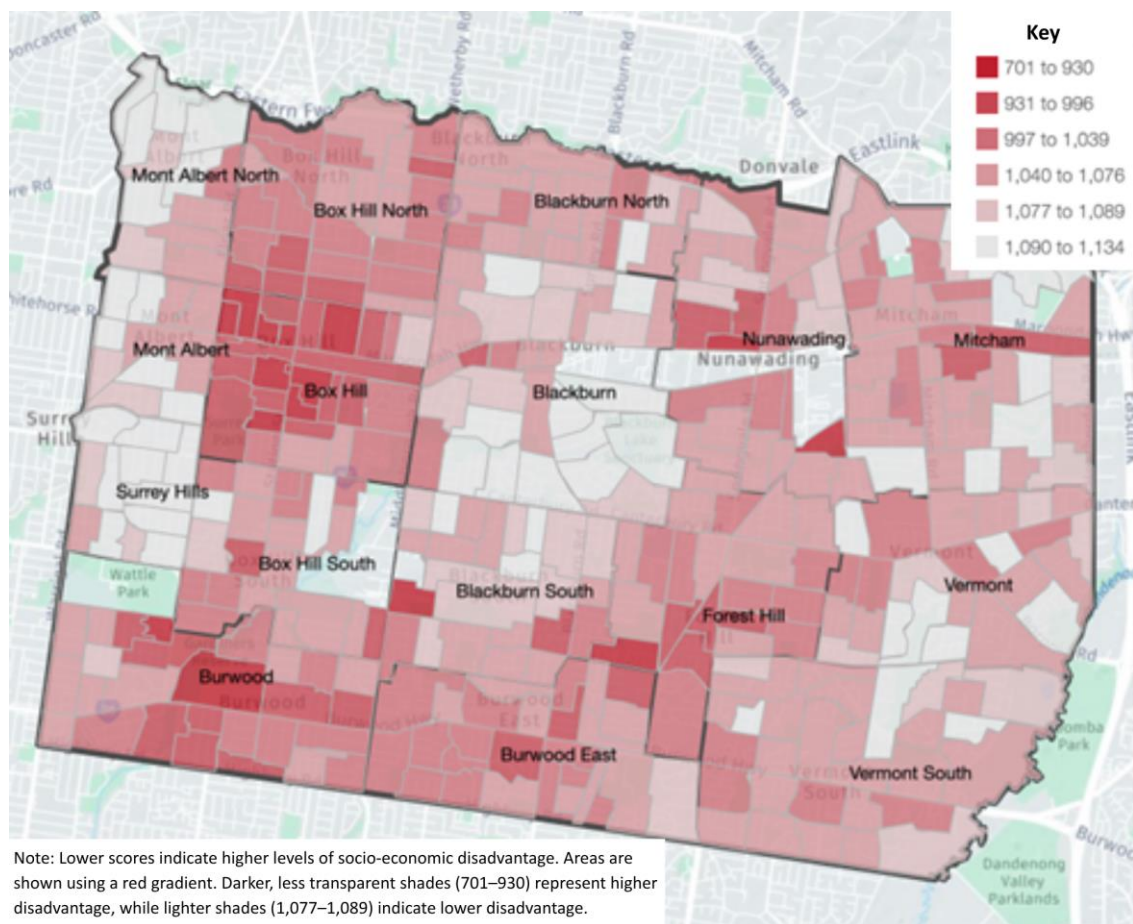


Figure 4: Whitehorse Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage data per SA1 level

Key Insights

Food relief services are unevenly distributed

Food relief services are concentrated around train lines and major activity centres, particularly Box Hill, with fewer services available in suburban residential areas. Consistent with Phase 1 findings on the distribution of food outlets, this may create additional barriers for residents who live further from activity centres, especially those with limited mobility or without access to private transport.

Community food access initiatives provide opportunities to strengthen local food access

Six community food access initiatives, including community gardens and food swaps, were identified across Whitehorse. While these initiatives provide valuable alternative food access options, there is potential to expand their reach and contribution to a more equitable and sustainable local food system.

Transport accessibility influences food access

Access to public transport varies across the municipality, with lower bus coverage in suburbs including Vermont South, Box Hill North, Box Hill South, Blackburn South and Blackburn North. Transport barriers, such as infrequent services, difficulty transporting groceries, limited parking and mobility challenges, can further restrict access to food outlets and food relief services.

Some suburbs experiencing compounded barriers to food access

Box Hill North has limited access to food outlets, public transport and food relief services, while Box Hill South and Vermont South experience both transport and food relief access challenges. These overlapping barriers may increase the risk of food access inequities.

Socioeconomic position alone does not explain food access patterns

While previous research has identified an association between socioeconomic position and the distribution and types of food outlets,(3) this pattern was not clearly observed in Whitehorse. The findings suggest that factors such as geographic location, transport accessibility, and the distribution of food outlets and food relief services may have a greater influence on food access within the municipality.

Food access extends beyond local government boundaries

Residents living near municipal borders may access food outlets and services in neighbouring local government areas. As a result, local mapping may not fully capture how people access food in practice.

Recommendations

- Improve the geographic distribution of food relief services and explore outreach or mobile service models to better support residents in underserved areas.
- Support the establishment and expansion of community food access initiatives across Whitehorse, particularly in areas with limited food access.
- Investigate targeted transport solutions, such as community or shuttle bus services, that connect residents in high-need areas with food outlets and food relief services.
- Prioritise Box Hill North, Box Hill South and Vermont South in future food access

planning, including support for local food initiatives and stronger connections between existing services and communities.

- Use a range of indicators, beyond socioeconomic position alone, to identify and prioritise areas for food access interventions, including transport access, proximity to food outlets and services
- Consider food outlets and services in neighbouring council areas and collaborate with neighbouring councils when planning and implementing food access initiatives.

Next steps

This mapping provides an initial picture of food access in Whitehorse and can be strengthened as new data become available. A future opportunity is the Australian Food Atlas, a national project being developed by researchers to map food businesses and food access across Australia.

When Victorian data from the Australian Food Atlas become available, it will provide information on additional types of food businesses, such as cafés, restaurants and takeaway outlets, that were not included in this analysis. This will help build a more complete understanding of where people access food in Whitehorse and identify areas where access may be limited. The Atlas will also allow food access information to be considered alongside population and health data, supporting more informed planning and decision-making.

Sources

1. North Eastern Public Health Unit, SUSTAIN. NEPHU Food Environment Maps: Whitehorse City Council (Final Report 2024). North Eastern Public Health Unit; 2024
2. Whitehorse City Council idcommunity. City of Whitehorse, Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage 2021 [Internet]. Com.au. 2021 [cited 2026 Apr 17]. Available from: <https://atlas.id.com.au/whitehorse>
3. Needham C, Strugnell C, Allender S, Orellana L. Beyond food swamps and food deserts: exploring urban Australian food retail environment typologies. Public Health Nutr. 2022 Jan 13;25(5):1-13. doi: 10.1017/S136898002200009X